

For immediate release: October 15, 2001  
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## **Workforce Awards Recognize Welfare-To-Work Efforts, Program Excellence**

*(Editor's/ News Directors: For detailed information and photos on honorees in your area call 573-526-2423)*

Fourteen Missourians were honored at the 2001 Governor's Conference on Workforce Development last week as "Alumni of the Year" for successfully completing job training and entering the workforce through Missouri's welfare to work programs. Gov. Bob Holden recognized alumni from each of the state's 14 workforce development regions.

In addition, the annual program awards were presented to recognize individuals and organizations that demonstrate special achievement and excellence in specific aspects of workforce development.

Over 900 attended the annual conference, representing state agencies, workforce investment boards, business, education and other partners in Missouri's efforts to develop its workforce.

"A well trained, well educated workforce has never been more important than it is now as we face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Gov. Holden told the group. "Fortunately, Missouri is a national leader in workforce development. We are leaders not only in supporting businesses, but also in supporting employees."

Holden pointed out that Missouri workers are 10 percent more productive than the national average, which he said "is a direct reflection on the quality of our workforce development programs and to the work ethic of Missouri men and women."

Holden said the Alumni of the Year Awards are testaments to the quality of Missouri's programs, the quality of staff in the division of workforce development, and the strong partnerships the state has with public and private sector groups.

"Each of the 14 regions has selected an alumni to be honored. These honorees have overcome obstacles such as loss of job, poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, inadequate education, imprisonment, abandonment by a spouse, and health difficulties," said Holden.

"Although each alumni has a different story, there is a common thread. Fourteen men and women who decided they wanted to change their lives for the better. And once they made that decision, the partners and programs of our Division of Workforce Development were there to help."

This year's award winners are: Beverlee Slaton of St. Louis; Tonia Comparato of Festus; Ida Glenn of St. Charles; Duane Inge of St. Louis; Melissa Lowery of Kansas City; Michael Ransburg of Kansas City; Charity Halstead of Trenton; Anita Easton of Charleston; Madonna Welte of Rockaway Beach (Taney County); Chris Crosby of Anderson (McDonald County); Deana Pulliam of Birch Tree; Gary Baumli of Edwards (Benton County); Wonsin Fisher of Fort Leonard Wood; and Julia Connelly of Kirksville.

Special Achievement of Excellence Program award recipients are: Leadership -- Darlene Christian, Adult Education Classroom, St. Joseph; Innovation -- Workforce Investment Board of St. Louis County Welfare-to-Work Behavioral Sciences; Collaboration -- The A+ Computer Repair Training Program to place ex-offenders in jobs, Jefferson City; Private Sector Participation -- Sprint, of Kansas City.

Rick Beasley, acting director of the Missouri Division of Workforce Development, pointed out that this conference is very important as an opportunity to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Missouri's programs to develop workers.

"We hear a lot of talk about economic development and its importance to our state. But we must not forget that workforce is a very vital economic development strategy," said Beasley.